



GRAND RIVER HERITAGE MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July - August - September, 1997

Report From Your Editor

COMING EVENTS:

Spring is here at last, and your summer newsletter is being mailed to you early to inform you of a few **events coming up soon:**

On **June 15th**, we have been invited by one of our members, **Betsy McBurney**, to hold a meeting at her home on River Road south of Cayuga at 10 a.m. She is inviting several of her neighbours who are knowledgeable about the mines and the early history of Gypsum Mines. Please bring a lunch, notebook, camera and walking shoes. After lunch we will do some exploring. This is in the area that was once the village of Gypsum Mines. In the vicinity were the Case/Merritt mine, and also the Glenny, Teasdale, Excelsior, Anthany and the New England Gypsum Company.

Mary Nelles has suggested that, for those of us in Brant County, on our way back from Betsy's, we stop off and see an **art show of the works of the late Tim Kenyon**. The theme of many of his pictures is **Haldimand County History**, and there are 53 pictures in the display. This is sponsored by York Grand River Historical Society at the **Haldimand County Museum**, and is well worth seeing. Admission is \$2. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday - 10 to 5 p.m., and **Sunday - 12 to 5.**

We have been invited to have a **display and make a presentation** at a Sunday afternoon open house at **Haldimand County Museum** in Cayuga on **July 20th**, from **1 to 4 p.m.** Members who are interested in an information meeting should take advantage of this opportunity, and are invited to bring interested guests.

DIRECTIONS: (1) To reach **Haldimand County Museum** from Brantford, take Highway 54 through Caledonia to Cayuga. On your right hand side, coming south, you will see Haldimand County buildings, Court house and offices. Turn right at the corner and park in the parking area behind the County building. You will see the museum across the lawn behind the Court House.

(2) To find **Betsy's** house, continue southeast on Highway 54 to the lights in the centre of town. Turn left and proceed until you see the I.G.A. on your left. Turn right. Proceed for 2 or 3 miles. Betsy's house is on the left just beside the old red schoolhouse.

Phone us (Jean or Ilse) to arrange a car pool.

We have been invited to share display space again with **York Grand River Historical Society** at the **Golden Horseshoe Steam Show** on **Civic Holiday Weekend, August 2, 3, and 4**. Again, we ask for volunteers to assist us. Phone us to make arrangements.

Your editor,

Jean Farquharson

Jean

REPORTS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH GROUP

by Ilse Kraemer

In spite of the cold and wet weather, and now the plentiful blackflies, we have been out exploring and discovering more about the mining industry in the Grand River Watershed.

For our first meeting at **Five Oaks**, the water level of the Grand was very low, and so we had hoped to be able to walk along the river's edge to relocate the tunnels we had found some years ago. But conditions were too treacherous and muddy, we looked for the old apple trees where Catherine Hill, captive of the Indians, had lived in the 1700's; we actually found a few, but they could not have been the original apple trees. It was again a thrill to see the herons busy in their nests with their young ones. We could see a few small heads sticking out over the nests.

The second meeting brought us back to the **Mile Hill area**. This area where 15 mine tunnels were located has changed a lot in the few years since we first found it. Many landslides and collapses have occurred, and many more sinkholes dot the area. It never stays the same here for long because the hillside is so unstable. We climbed down the hillside by Mrs. Jones' property. We had to go in a zigzag course because it is so very steep. New collapses and some more pipes were visible. Some members took a lot of pictures. We followed a roadway along the bottom of the hill (it could have been a dinky train track), toward Ted Hammond's house. This track ended at a massive rock outcrop filled with old garbage. This could be another tunnel. If somebody feels ambitious, the garbage could be cleaned out to examine the hole. It could also have been where they quarried limestone because there was a limestone kiln close by. Meter thick tufa areas, strange vegetation and grasses, the beginning of a perched fen - who knows what all is hidden down there in the muddy hollow. It is certainly not a pleasant place, with the strong fumes of sour gas, and collapsing tunnels.

We planned to visit the **Cleator mine**, but no one showed up but Jean and myself, so we did it alone. Mrs. Munroe gave us permission to walk on the property. It is an ever-changing scene along the river; new tunnels had closed, and others had opened. The high water this spring did a lot of damage and altered the water course by eroding a lot of the land along the west bank of the river. We photographed the last remains of the old corduroy road to complete our collection of photos in that area.

On May 4th, we carried out more research on the **Holstein mine** on the west side of the river at Caledonia. Last year, we had found some tunnels on the south side of Highway 6; now we looked further north, and hit pay dirt. We found ten tunnel openings, spaced about 25 feet apart. Each three tunnels had a combined ramp down to the old road along the edge of the river. This road led up to the old Hagens farm. Horse-drawn wagons used this route to transport the gypsum up to the then Alabastine Co. plant on the other side of the river. Some of the mines were starting to open up again. It was a very special moment for us when we found all these mine openings. It appears that these mines were "wild mines". The property was owned by the Holstein family, but they did not mine it. Perhaps the mines were leased out. Very little was written about it. In a government

publication, *Gypsum in Canada*, published in 1911, the author Cole, stated in the well-drilling report on this property that they found gypsum at a depth of 60 feet from the surface. The first layer of gypsum was 2 feet thick, pink gypsum, followed by 3 feet of shale, then by 9 feet of pure white gypsum. Many shafts were dug over the years; if one collapsed, they just dug another one next to it. Looking at the collapses from the top, one must assume the tunnel length of a few hundred feet. The whole area has a very strong smell of hydrogen sulphide gas, very poisonous and known to occur with gypsum formations. One old-timer, Mr. A. Thompson, remembers as a youngster that his father hauled gypsum with his horse and wagon from the Holstein mine to the Alabastine plant in Caledonia, where it was calcined and shipped to Paris, Ontario.

On May 11th, we explored the area along the **West River Road** between Paris and Glen Morris, where last fall Cathy McArthur had discovered many interesting things when she explored the valley. It was a beautiful morning, warm and sunny. Getting out of the car, we were greeted by swarms of blackflies. After a good spray of Deep Woods, down the steep hill we went towards the river. We found lovely spring flowers, birds singing, and the sound of gushing water. To our surprise, we found a stream flowing right out of the hill. Among a lot of old pipes and square wooden ones, beside some old ruins, we found a working water ram. The owner of this property, who lives on the other side of the hill, appeared and told us a bit about the history of the area. The ruins were once a building with a wooden water wheel to pump the water up the hill to the farms. The water is very good and clean. Since the many lakes of Pinehurst area have no runout, they drain underground, filter through deep layers of gravel and emerge on this spot out of the hill. We saw a lot of tufa and some old kilns, indicating the inhabitants had been calcining it many years ago. We were very impressed with the natural drainage of all the lakes in this area.

After this excursion, we went back to the **Torrance Mine** area south of Paris. Down the hill below Westcast, we found a lot of new sinkholes, small and large, which have developed in the last few years. This verified what people had told us - that there had been mining activities at this spot as well as further north. We walked between the river and the hiking trail, along the steep hillside, where we were told a mine tunnel with a square entrance was seen some years ago. The tunnel was six feet high and six feet wide, with a two foot thick layer of green gypsum. The miners supposedly had scratched their names and the year in the rock. We found evidence of mines, but none was open. There are so many landslides that the mines that are visible one year are covered over the next.

On May 18th we went back to the **Torrance mine** to continue our explorations. The water was so high this spring that even the tunnels were flooded. We observed many changes; huge sections of conglomerate had slid down the embankment, and now it was very difficult to walk along the river's edge. The flood had exposed a lot of gypsum outcrops not seen before. Caves had formed with strong-flowing springs emerging out of the hill. We found the mines and exploration trenches of miners Wright and Hynes. Even the ruins of a homestead were still there, all overgrown by vines and bushes. On the way back, we noticed fresh animal tracks in a freshly ploughed field - cougar tracks! Cathy told us that people in this area had seen the cougar and heard it screaming at night. Last winter, I encountered a cougar not too far away from this area. Don't worry, they are shy and retreating creatures.

Since the weather has been so bad on the weekends, we have had not more outings recently. However, Sanko and I went out exploring into the **Caledonia area**, on the southwest side of the river. There are old exploration shafts in this area, and in a woodlot, we found many huge round sinkholes, all in a straight line - more mines? Wild mines? Who knows? Maybe a continuation of the exploration shaft which is only one lot over. More research is needed for here.

On June 1st, it was raining cats and dogs, so we went to visit my daughter Ramona in **Glen Williams**, and fortunately there was no rain there. She is still researching the mines along the Niagara Escarpment in her area. She found a whole lot more **sandstone** was mined here. She has not found the name for these newly located mines. They seem to be very old, with a different technique used to extract the rock. There were lots

of tunnels open. We found some huge iron bolts fastened to the rocks, indicating that a cable must have stretched over the gully to transport the sandstone blocks to the other side. A cut through the woods was still visible. We encountered many limestone kilns, which had been heated with wood, because much charcoal was visible. Some were arranged in a circle. We will look for some written documentation.

I found many strange plants and bushes in this area. There were a lot of burning bushes, Canada wood betony, and a beautiful pale yellow flower with a striking beautiful leaf. I had never seen Canada violets before, with its large pure white blossoms. We have not yet identified some of the plants. We would like to do some more work in this area soon. Who is interested?

FIELD TRIPS:

Ilse told you in her field trip report about the research hikes we have already held this year. We took advantage of the weather, when it was good, to visit several places.

Please contact Ilse to find out when and where the field trips will be held in the future. Her phone number is **519-756-6634**. We encourage your participation.

RESEARCH NOTES:

The publicity received about our organization in the Brantford Expositor and Paris Star has resulted in some more contacts - information about the Torrances and Cavans who were involved in the mines south of Paris. We also received some contacts about people who might be able to tell us something about the mines on East River Road.

I led an **historical walking tour of Paris** with the proceeds going to the Paris Public Library, where we were allowed to use the Board Room for our display and a pre-talk. We raised \$117. Thank you Norm Derrick, Mary Cassar and Mike O'Byrne for your assistance. We made some valuable contacts at this event.

I was also invited to give a talk to **Grades 5 and 6 at North Ward School** in Paris on the gypsum mines to fit into a unit they are studying on the Grand River. The students asked some interesting questions.

Garth Pottruff has been in contact with me and Ilse, and has reported he is gathering much more information from several sources about the **history of the Five Oaks area**. We are pleased that he is compiling the information for us, which we will include in our booklet. We hope to get it out soon.

Mike O'Byrne is still working on the **Miner's Cookbook** all by himself. He has received permission to use some miners' recipes out of Ed Andre's book, *Heroes of Darkness*, and he is gathering old mining pictures to illustrate it. Very few recipes have been received from our members for our cookbook contest. **Last call for recipes!** Please send them to Michael O'Byrne, 676 Mt. Pleasant Rd., Mount Pleasant ON N0E 1K0.

PLEASE NOTE: We would like to send as part of the newsletter a list of all members and their addresses. Members who wish their names to be excluded from this list should contact me by September.

This newsletter is edited by Jean Farquharson. Submissions are welcome. We are not responsible for errors. We are looking for more information about the mining industry in S. Ont.. Please send correspondence to: Jean Farquharson, R.R. #, Paris, ON N3L 3E3. Phone 519-442-2156, FAX 442-2373.